(a) whether Government has made agreements with few countries till date during the last three years to send workers abroad;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether provisions have been made in the agreements to provide wages and other facilities to the workers; and

(d) the details of the places where these workers are proposed to be sent?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) The Ministry has been signing bilateral MoUs on labour with countries where there are large number of Indian emigrant workers with a view to ensuring their protection and welfare abroad. In December 2006 the Government signed an MoU with the UAE and in April 2007 with Kuwait. In November 2007 an Additional Protocol with Qatar was signed to update the 1985 Agreement.

(c) The provisions for wages and other facilties are made in the labour contract signed between the employer and the worker. The bilateral agreements/MoUs reinforce of the contractual provisions; and

(d) Government does not send workers to any place. The workers are free to select their destination country, as per demand.

Problem of minimum wages in Gulf countries

2247. SHRI SHREEGOPAL VYAS: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Indians working in Gulf countries are facing minimum wage problem;

(b) if so, the mechanism to help them; and

(c) the break up of men, women skilled/unskilled workers in each of the Gulf countries, country-wise?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) Minimum wages for wokers have not been prescribed by the local laws in the Gulf countries, and the wages are determined by the contracts between the employer and the worker. However for effective protection and welfare of women emigrants, Government of India has decided to ensure a minimum wages since they are in the most vulnerable category. The minimum wage are fixed by the Indian Missions concerned in the range of US$ 300-350 per months after taking into account the prevailing market wage in that country.

(c) As per reports received from the Indian Missions in the Gulf countries, the following is the approximate break up of men and women working there.

	Kuwait	Bahrain	Oman	S.Arabia	UAE	Qatar
Men	416500	216839	396500	1314847	1400000 (both men and women)	239000
Women	94661	17116	35500	35805		11000

No separate data on skilled/unskilled workers is available with the Missions. However, the Missions in Saudi Arabia and UAE have reported that as per rough estimates 80% and

65% of the workers respectively are blue collared workers, whereas the Mission in Qatar has reported that approximately 65 to 70% are unskilled and semi skilled workers.

Welfare schemes for workers in Gulf countries

2248. PROF. P.J. KURIEN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is contemplating any welfare scheme for the Indians working in Gulf countries;

(b) whether Government has received any representation in this regard;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) the steps Government proposes to take to set up the welfare schemes; and

(e) the details of welfare schemes?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS *(SHRI VAYALAR RAVI)*: (a) to (e) The Government is considering a proposal to establish a welfare fund for the benefit of emigrants. The proposal envisages provision of welfare services to the emigrants at all stages — financial support to meet emigration expenses at the pre-emigration stage, on-site welfare during their stay abroad and need based rehabilitation services after their return to India. The Welfare Fund is likely to be established during the financial year 2008-09. Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojna is already being implemented to provide insurance safeguards to the emigrants against unforeseen exigencies. In addition, the Government has launched at Help-line for emigrants, is implementing a scheme for skill upgradation and pre-departure orientation, is setting up a Council for Promotion of Overeseas Employment and is signing MOUs with the receiving countries for the protection and welfare of emigrants.

Financial Assistance to Gram Panchayats

†2249. SHRI RUDRA NARAYAN PANY: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) the financial assistance being provided to Gram Panchayats by Central Government under Panchayati Raj scheme;

(b) whether it is a fact that funds being given to district panchayats at some places called district council have been curtailed and those funds are being allocated to schemes being implemented under "National Rural Employment Guarantee Act"; and

(c) if so, the actual rights of district panchayats at present and their financial power?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) The Central Government does not directly send financial assistance to Gram Panchayats: funds meant for Panchayati Raj Institutions are routed through State Governments.

(b) The previous SGRY has been subsumed in NREGA and under NREGA at least fifty percent of the expenditure is mandatorily required to be allocated to the Panchayat at the village level. NREGA also provides for district panchayats to approve the district shelf of projects.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.